DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 316 471 SO 020 596

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TITLE Philosophical Implications in the Teaching of History.
PUB DATE 23 Jun 89
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Methods; *Educational Philosophy; *Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; Existentialism; Experimental Curriculum; *History Instruction; Philosophy; Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS Essentialism; Experimentalism; History Curriculum

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses three diverse philosophical schools of thought that pertain to the teaching of history. The identification of objectives, selection of learning activities, and methods of pupil achievement appraisal are outlined for each school of thought. Experimentalism emphasizes diverse methods of instruction, a stimulating environment, and the importance of problem solving using relevant examples. Group activities are stressed in which pupils identify and solve problems. Essentialism emphasizes precise content in the study of history in which measurable objectives are predetermined and written by the teacher. Pupils are not involved in developing objectives or learning activities. Textbooks, rote learning, and memorization of facts and concepts is emphasized. Existentialism stresses the role of personal choice on the part of learners. Each pupil is responsible for choosing between competing purposes and values in an environment involving dilemma situations. The curriculum is open-ended and provides opportunities for free choice by learners. (AS)

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PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

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Which objectives should pupils achieve in the history curriculum? Who should be involved in selecting learning activities to achieve desired ends? How should pupil achievement be appraised? These are relevant questions for teachers of history to consider. Criteria are needed by the history teacher in selecting objectives, learning activities, and evaluation methods. Guidance and direction in making these decisions can come from a depth study and evaluation of diverse philosophical schools of thought.

Experimentalism and the History Curriculum

Problem solving is a major method to utilize in the teaching of history, according to experimentalists. In the problem solving arena, needed content to arrive at solutions to problematic situations is not necessarily classified in terms of coming from one academic discipline only. Whatever content is needed by learners is utilized in the solving of problems. Problems identified by learners with teacher guidance may necessitate obtaining content from the curriculum area of history largely. The teacher needs to provide a stimulating environment which encourages pupils to identify problems. Thus, reading materials and audio-visual aids as well as listening, speaking, and writing experiences may provide such an environment. These problems should be realistic and relevant in the school setting and in society. What is vital in society may provide meaningful content in the school curriculum. School and society must not be separated from each other. In a unit on "Issues in Society", pupils might choose problems, such as the following:

1. How can peace among nations be encouraged?

2. What methods might be utilized to minimize pollution in its diverse forms?

3. Which means can be used to conserve natural resources?

After relevant problems have been identified, pupils with teacher guidance need to work in committees to obtain needed data utilizing a variety of learning activities. Hypotheses (probable answers to identified problems) are then developed and tested. Additional research might be completed as a means of appraising the developed hypothesis, which may then be modified, if necessary. New problems may also be identified within the framework of data gathering procedures. Experimentalists generally believe that pupils need to work on committees in problem solving activities since group endeavors are involved in society in identifying and solving problematic situations. Pupils need to be actively involved in selecting problems, as well as test solutions within the arena of problem solving.

Experimentalists would oppose:

1. Measurably stated objectives predetermined by the teacher for pupil attainment.

2. Programmed learning materials for learner utilization.

3. The use of reputable textbooks in history outside the domain of problem solving.

4. The use of lectures in teaching history.

5. The utilization of learning centers in which problem solving situations are clearly not in evidence.

6. Deductive uses of relevant transparencies, filmstrips, films, slides, tapes, and library resources. The only exception would be if subject matter

learned from the use of these materials provides content for problems to be solved by involved learners.

7. A passive learning environment in which subject matter learnings move from the presenter to the learner.

Essentialism in the History Curriculum

Essentialists are rather certain in determining what pupils should learn in diverse units of study pertaining to history. Historical content, according to essentialists, is precise; thus, measurable objectives can be written by the teacher for pupil attainment. The history teacher, of course, needs to develop a logical, rather than psychological curriculum. Sequential objectives must then be developed by the teacher logically to aid pupils to achieve optimally. The teachers must also select learning activities for pupils to attain the stated objectives.

A psychological curriculum in terms of using teacher-pupil planning to determine what learners are to learn (objectives) as well as the means of learning (activities and experiences) is not recommended by essentialists. Learning centers in which pupils individually may choose tasks to complete sequentially, of course, also are not recommended by essentialists.

There are specific facts, concepts, and generalizations in the history curriculum which all pupils need to achieve, according to essentialists. These learnings may be perceived as representing universal ideas. Thus, content in history can be selected which has stood the test of time in terms of being relevant and significant for pupils. Basal, reputable history textbooks might provide major learnings for pupils in ongoing units of study. These textbooks

may well contain subject matter learnings which pertain to the hallmarks of an educated person. Meaningful learning, as well as rote learning and memorization, can be relevant methods for the teacher to use in the teaching of history. Activity centered methods of teaching, e.g. art projects, construction experiences, and dramatic activities are generally not recommended by essentialists.

Essentialists also generally do not emphasize:

1. A changing curriculum in history. What is deemed as being vital learnings in the history curriculum can be identified rather objectively. These facts, concepts, and generalizations have stood the test of time in terms of significance.

2. A permissive classroom environment. The teacher of history must demand and receive respect from pupils. A no nonsense learning climate, of course, is much superior to a permissive environment. Thus, obedience from pupils is desired within the framework of formal teaching in the school-class setting.

3. The concept of learning to be superior to the concept of teaching. The teacher teaches and pupils must do the learning of historical content. Subject matter in history is presented by the teacher and must reach the minds of pupils.

4. Inductive learning is superior to deductive learning. The teacher must be a highly knowledgable person in terms of identifying important historical content for pupils to acquire. Thus, the teacher presents what is relevant to learn to pupils, and pupils are the receivers of significant historical ideas.

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Existentialists believe that the individual, not committees or larger groups, make choices in terms of what to learn (the objectives) as well as the

means of learning (activities and experiences). The pupil then, individually, chooses what is vital to learn in the history curriculum. Authentic decisions must be made by learners in a completely free, non-coercive learning environment. Each person must make choices in order to truly be human. The involved individual may choose to work within small or large group settings; however, these are personal choices which must be left to the involved individual who is responsible personally for all decisions made.

Each human being must seek purpose or meaning in life. These purposes are not given to any one human being. Thus, dilemma situations arise between and among competing purposes in the lives of all human beings. A depth study of history may well provide selected content for pupils' consideration in developing purpose or values in life. Decisions made by individuals, groups, and nations, past and present, involved dilemmas. Choices had to be made from competing purposes and values. These choices need to be evaluated by pupils in terms of being moral and authentic. Each person is responsible for choices made in a generally absurd, irrational world, according to existentialists. The existentialist learner may be one who is willing to become alienated, as a result of personal authentic moral choices made.

Existentialists do not advocate the use of:

1. Behaviorally stated objectives in teaching-learning situations chosen by the teacher. These kinds of objectives emphasize conformity behavior on the part of learners to predetermined ends. Pupils then cannot make choices and decisions in terms of ends as well as means of learning.

2. Teachers selecting learning activities for pupils. Rather, an open-ended curriculum needs to be in evidence. To develop proficiency in the decision-

making arena, learners need to have ample opportunities to choose freely in an environment involving dilemma situations. Each pupil needs to make moral choices within the framework of value laden situations.

3. Evaluation procedures developed and implemented by the teacher to appraise pupil progress. The individual learner develops value systems and increasingly appraises what has personal worth.

Selected References

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